

SEPTEMBER 1788

*"warpt a piece"*3 4 *I have been at home.*

Clear. I have been at home. Old Mr Smily here. Mrs Savage warpt a piece here.

4 5 *I have been at home. Death of Mrs Springer & O Neall Executed*

Clear. Mr Ballard gone to Mr James Pages on public business. Jonathan & Taylor went to see the Execution of Oneal. I have been at home. The Girls washt. Gilbreath sleeps here. The wife of old Mr Springer Departed this Life this morn.

5 6 *Death of Doctor Colmans infant. I was there. Dolly finisht her web 44 1/2 yds. Beriah Ingerham had a son born.*

Clear. I went to Doct Colmans at 1 hour pm. His Child Expird at 4. I put on the grave Cloaths and tarried till 7. Colo North and Lady there. I found Mrs Williams & Mrs Harris here at my return. I sett up till very late to finish Hannahs stockins.

6 7 *Funeral of Mrs Springer & Doctor Colmans infant. I attended the latter.*

Clear. I attended funeral of Doctor Colmans infant. Calld at Mrs

Williams. Find her very sick. The Doctor gave her a puke. I tarried all night.

7 E *Hannah is gone to Son Towns with Sherebiah*

Clear. I came home. Left Mrs Williams very ill. I slept some & went there again at Evin. Mrs Pollard & others there. Charlotte & Polly Cool there. Parthena watches. The Reverend Mr Moore preacht.

8 2 *I was at Widow Williams*

Cloudy & Cool. I went to see Mrs Williams. Spent the afternoon. Left her more Comfortable. My girls washt. Mr Fillbrooks here this Eving. Mr Gill returnd from Winthrop.

9 3 *Town Meeting. I have been at home. Mrs Savage here.*

Clear day. Thee Town Mett to hear Reverend Mr Fosters Proposals but did not except them. Dolly & Parthena went to see Mrs Hamlin. Mrs Savage here. Shee has spun 40 double skeins for me since April 15th and had 2 Bushl of ashes & some phisic for James, & Dolly wove her 7 yds of Diaper. I let her have 1 skein of lining warp. The whole is 6/ X.

10 4 *I was at Wido Willimss. Voce here. Clarisa Barton is 18 years old this Day.*

Clear. Mr Voce & Parmer Laying Shingles on our house. We Brewed. I went to see wido Williams. Shee is Better. Dolly winding the warp for Check.

11 5 *I have been at home. Cyrus is 32 years old.*

Cloudy part of the day. Cyrus is gone to Gardners mill. He is 32 years old this day. I have been at home. Dolly warpt a piece for Mrs Pollard of 39 yards.

12 6 *At home.*

Clear. Dolly warpt & drawd in a piece for Check. Laid 45 yds. I have been at home knitting. Mrs Harris here at Eving.

13 7 *Mr Voce & son here shingleing the house. I have been at wido Williamss*

Clear & pleasant. We spread the diaper out for whitening. I was at wido Williamss. Shee is some Better. Dolly sleeps with her.

14 E *I was at meeting & at Wido Williams*

Clear & pleasant. I attended worship in public. Nathaniel Norcross desired prayers, he being sick with a fever. Revd Mr Foster Delivered two Excellent Discourses from Psalm 90 & 12 vers.

15 2 *At home. Received Letters from Brother Barton & Collins Moore of Sept 7th & 5th.*

Clear. Mr Ballard gone to Mr Carrs on public business. I have been at home. My girls washt. We received a Letter from Brother Collins which informs that Sister Nabby was thought at the point of death & our other Friends were well. Jonathan is gone to Son Towns.

16 3 *At home. I was Calld to Eliab Shaws in the night.*

Cloudy. I have been at home. Am not so well as I could wish. Mrs Savage, Wido Williams & Mrs Harris here at Evin. The girls went to Mr Craggs. Jonathan is returned.

17 4 *At Shaws. Mr Learned Came here. Brogt me a Letter from Sister Waters of the 12th instant. David Fletcher a daughter Born*

I was Calld between 12 & 1 hour morn to Eliab Shaws wife in travail. Shee was safe delivd at the 11th [hour] of a fine Daughter. I left them Cleverly & returned at 4 pm. Mr Hains Learned Came here. He left home Last wednesday. I received a Letter by him from Sister Waters dated at Boston. Mr. Ballard is gone to the hook. Taylor Came here this day.

*Birth of Eliab Shaws Daughter. Received fee October 22, 1792 by Ephraim.*



Historians sometimes refer to the structure of relations in a community as a "social web." For eighteenth-century Hallowell, the metaphor is apt. In Martha's vocabulary a "web" was a quantity of thread woven—or about to be woven—in a single piece, as on September 5, 1788, when "Dolly finisht her web 44 1/2 yds."<sup>1</sup> Most textile entries in the diary document a personal relationship as well as a process:

"Polly [Savage] wound & warpt & I drawd in Mrs Williams webb"

"Hannah began to weave Cyrus' web"

"Dolly finisht Mrs Porters webb"

"Mrs Welch [or Hamlin or Child or Pollard or Densmore or Savage] here this day to warp a webb"

In an economy characterized by family production, Martha not only employed her daughters, Hannah and Dolly, and her nieces, Pamela and Parthenia, but a succession of hired helpers like Hannah Cool and Polly Savage. She relied on married neighbors like Jane Welch or Hannah Hamlin to help her inexperienced girls warp the loom, the girls in turn weaving for other families in town. Though she grew her own flax, all the cotton she spun, and until 1790 the wool as well, was gotten in trade with neighbors. The production of cloth wove a social web.

The image can be extended. Imagine a breadth of checkered linen of the sort Dolly "warpt & drawd in" on September 12, 1788, half the threads of bleached linen, the other half "coloured Blue." If Dolly alternated bands of dyed and undyed yarn on the warp in a regular pattern, white stripe following blue stripe, then filled in the weft in the same way, alternately spooling both bleached yarn and blue, the resulting pattern would be a checkerboard of three distinct hues. Where white thread crossed white thread, the squares would be uncolored, where blue crossed blue the squares would be a deep indigo, where white crossed blue or blue crossed white the result would be a lighter, mixed tone, the whole forming the familiar pattern of plain woven "check" even today. Think of the white threads as women's activities, the blue as men's, then imagine the resulting

social web. Clearly, some activities in an eighteenth-century town brought men and women together. Others defined their separateness.

September 4, 1787: "Mr Ballard gone to Mr James Pages on public business. . . . I have been at home. The Girls washt." Any account of gender definition in early America must begin with just such a contrast. Public business belonged to men, housework to women. In the past twenty years, that notion of "separate spheres" has shaped women's history. For many, the essential inquiry has been when and how women moved beyond the confining circle of domestic concerns into the larger world. Some have argued that the American Revolution connected women's private activities to the public sphere by publicizing their contributions to domestic manufacturing and stimulating a new appreciation of their roles as wives and mothers. Others believe it was women's activities in voluntary societies in the early nineteenth century that first gave them an identity within and beyond the household.<sup>3</sup>

Martha's diary complicates both arguments without challenging the evidence upon which they are based. There were no visible female organizations in Hallowell in the late eighteenth century, nor is there any evidence that Martha's identity was affected by republican ideology. The diary makes quite clear that men *did* monopolize public business, that households *were* formally patriarchal, and that women *did* uncritically assume that houses and even babies belonged to men and that the proper way to identify a married woman was by reference to her husband, as in "the wife of old Mr Springer Departed this Life this morn." Yet it also shows a complex web of social and economic exchange that engaged women beyond the household. Women in eighteenth-century Hallowell had no political life, but they did have a community life. The base of that community life was a gender division of labor that gave them responsibility for particular tasks, products, and forms of trade.

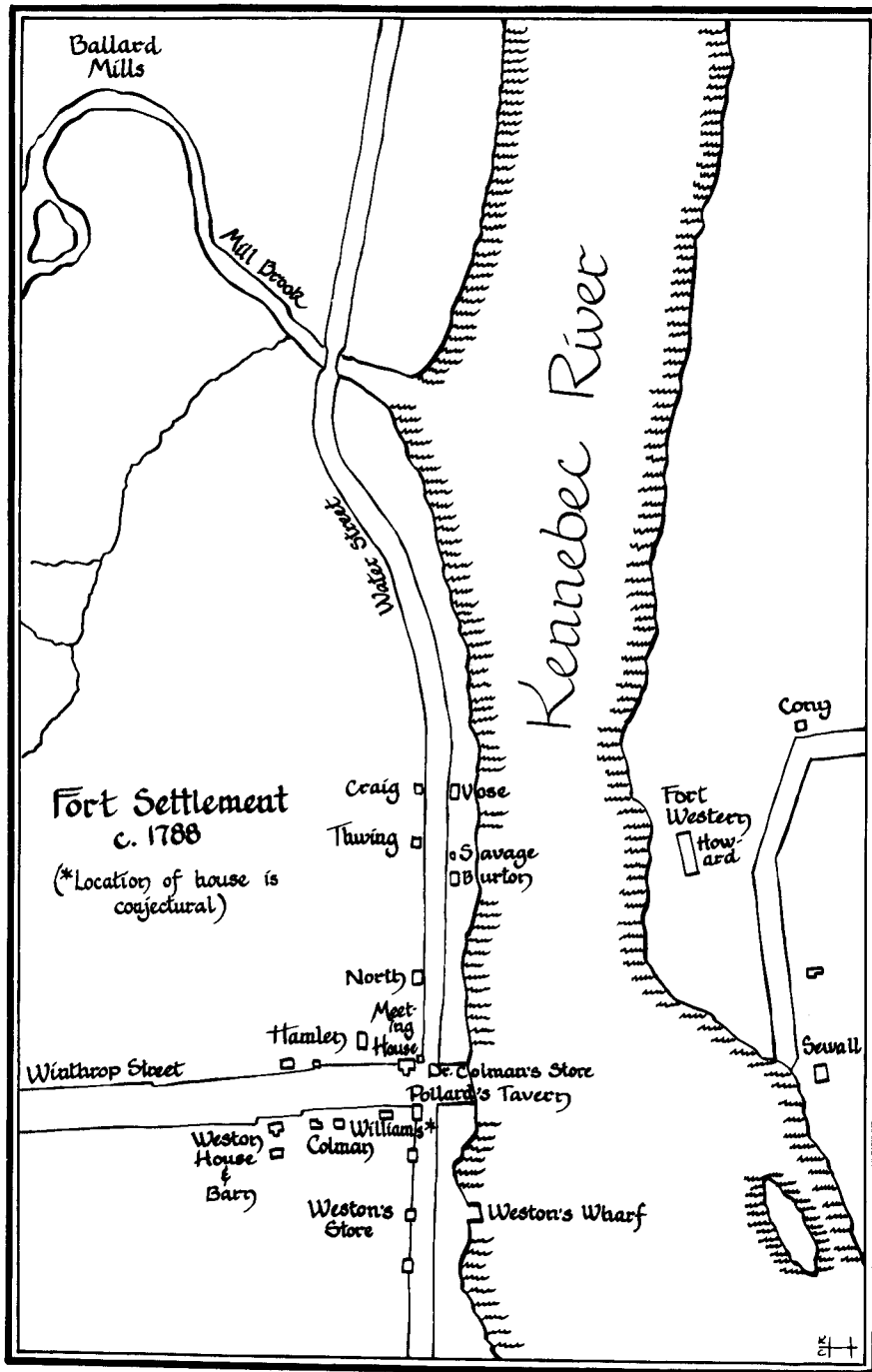
"Clear day. Thee Town Mett," Martha began her entry for September 9, 1788, adding in the margin, "I have been at home." There was no irony in the juxtaposition of those state-

ments. In political terms "thee Town" was an indigo square. When Ephraim Ballard (who was serving as selectman and town clerk in 1788) issued the warrant summoning the "freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Hallowell qualified to vote" to the meeting house, he was addressing the adult male population.<sup>4</sup> The men had much to talk about on September 9. As Ephraim reported it in the official minutes, a "paper signed by the Reverend Isaac Foster containing some terms which he proposed for a dismission, had two several Readings."<sup>5</sup> That Martha cared about that business is certain ("Thee Town Mett to hear Revd Mr Fosters Proposals but did not except them," she wrote), but she had more to do than sit home waiting for Ephraim to bring the news. Her full diary entry for September 9 restores women to a history that might otherwise bleach their lives into anonymity:

Dolly & Parthena went to see Mrs Hamlin. Mrs Savage here. Shee has spun 40 double skeins for me since April 15th and had 2 Bushl of ashes & some phisic for James, & Dolly wove her 7 yds of Diaper. I let her have 1 skein of lining [linen] warp. The whole is 6/ X.

While the men of Hallowell were at the meeting house conducting public business, Martha and her neighbor were completing some private business of their own.

There was nothing new in such behavior. New England women had long been engaged in barter and trade. The skein of linen warp that Martha gave Mrs. Savage on September 9 symbolizes the household production that characterized pre-industrial life, the neighborly trade that made such production possible, and the gender division of labor that assured women a place in economic life.<sup>6</sup> There is a striking congruence between the Hallowell textile economy and the system of social medicine described in Chapter One. Spinning, like nursing, was a universal female occupation, a "domestic" duty, integrated into a complex system of neighborly exchange. In both realms, training was communal and cumulative, work was cooperative, even



though performed in private households, and the products remained in the local economy. The most experienced weavers, all of them women, extended the skills of their female neighbors in much the same way midwives extended the abilities of nurses and watchers. Men broke flax, sheared sheep, and performed other supportive services (just as they fetched and transported midwives and sat up with their male neighbors), but women had primary responsibility for the production of cloth. As in medicine, elite males connected the Kennebec with the Atlantic, importing finished cloth and raw cotton from Britain and the West Indies, commodities that women transformed into usable products.<sup>7</sup>

A closer look at textile production in the Ballard family helps us to see the complexity of this system. When Martha's diary opened in 1785, Hannah and Dolly already knew how to operate the great woolen wheel and the smaller flax wheel that the family owned. In the next two years they produced hundreds of skeins of cotton, wool, linen, and tow thread, most of which their mother carried to others to weave.<sup>8</sup> In May of 1787, the family began assembling the equipment needed for weaving. Cyrus brought home "the bars & other utensils for weaving" on May 19, 1787, and a few days later his father spent part of a day "fixing the loom." Martha did her part by combing flax, "doubling yarn for the harness," and "quilling," while her husband fetched a kettle from the Savage house for "boiling a Lining warp." Dorcas Pollard warped the loom for the first time on May 25 and Hannah Cool "set the webb to work." These two young women helped to instruct Hannah Ballard, who was responsible for the web of forty yards that came out of the loom on July 4. On July 5, in preparation for the next round of weaving, Martha went to Mrs. Savage's to borrow a "sleigh" (an implement for controlling the pattern of a weave). Unfortunately, Mrs. Williams had already taken the one she wanted. Two weeks later she was successful in getting another from Merriam Pollard.<sup>10</sup>

Although Hannah and Dolly learned to weave check, diaper, huckaback, worsted, dimity, woolen "shurting," towels, blan-

kets, "rag coverlids," and lawn handkerchiefs, as well as "plain cloth," the exchanges with neighbors continued. Merriam Pollard continued to "instruct Dolly about her weaving" until the girls were able to return some of her services in kind, as on September 11, 1788: "Dolly warpt a piece for Mrs Pollard of 39 yards." Trading fiber and yarn, borrowing tools and kettles, the Ballards contributed to their own self-sufficiency and strengthened their bonds with their neighbors. The intricacy of the textile network is suggested in a diary entry for April 20, 1790: "Cyrus borrowed a 40 sleigh of the widdow Coburn for Dolly to weave a piece for Benjamin Porter."<sup>11</sup>

That mother, father, daughters, and at least one son were all involved in setting up the weaving operation supports Ruth Schwartz Cowan's point that in early America "men and women had to work in tandem in order to undertake any single life-sustaining chore."<sup>12</sup> On closer examination, however, what is most striking about the Ballard economy is the independence of men's and women's labors, not only in production but in management and utilization of resources. "Mr Savage made the irons for our Loom," Martha wrote on May 21, 1787. "I paid him 4 shillings in cash." After all, Martha was willing to bake bread or mend packs for Ephraim's surveying journeys; that he was willing to sow flax and set up the loom for her is hardly surprising. This is the kind of cooperativeness one might expect of family members. That either activity was part of a fully integrated family economy seems far-fetched. There were really two family economies in the Ballard household, one managed by Martha, the other by Ephraim.

It is no accident that Martha's midwifery practice accelerated at exactly the same time as her daughters began to weave. Freedom from childbearing was one prerequisite for a midwife's work. A secure supply of household help was another. An entry for October 26, 1789, puts it succinctly: "My girls spun 23 double skeins & wove 27 1/2 yds last week & did the houswork besides." By expanding textile production, Martha provided household help for herself and an occupation for her girls. She was not the sort of woman to turn her daughters into household

drudges, even if she could afford to. Hannah and Dolly needed skills to sustain their future families as well as ways to contribute to their own support in the present. Weaving was the perfect solution: It could be accomplished at home. It could be coordinated with other chores. It produced many of the items—bedsheets, ticking, blankets, towels, and coverlets—the girls would need in their future homes.

An alternate solution would have been to keep the mother at home and send the daughters out. This was what Martha's younger sister Dorothy Barton was forced to do. Perhaps "forced" is too strong a word. Living for a while outside one's own family was a kind of education for young women in this period—Hannah Ballard, for example, spent eight months in Oxford in 1789 living with her "Aunt Waters" and other relatives. Still, economic necessity seems to have played some part in the Bartons' case. Dorothy gave birth to six daughters before a son survived, a fact that may account for the difficulty her husband had in establishing a farm in Maine.<sup>13</sup> Stephen and Dorothy Barton returned to Oxford in 1788, leaving their oldest daughters behind. Clarissa and Pamela had both spent some time with Martha Ballard, Pamela none too happily. "Pamela has spunn 5 skeins of Linning this week & Been to Winthrop," Martha wrote drily in May of 1787. Pamela's sister Parthenia was a more satisfactory worker. She arrived on May 26, 1788, and, with occasional periods away working for other families, remained until her marriage in November of 1792. It was perhaps her presence that allowed Hannah to go to Oxford.<sup>14</sup>

We have already seen how a family mode of production encompassed wide-reaching exchanges with neighbors. Hallowell women exchanged daughters the way they exchanged kettles and sleighs, though as the girls grew older they themselves were responsible for negotiating their own terms and collecting their own wages. In slack times a woman might willingly part with her helpers, calling them home again when needed. Martha combined the long-term help of her daughters and niece with short-term help from other women. Married daughters were also integrated into this network of exchange. When Lucy

Towne suffered a "broken breast" after the birth of her fifth child, Martha dispatched Dolly to Winslow. Later Parthenia spent more than a month nursing Lucy during another postpartum crisis. Conversely, when Hannah had her first baby, Lucy sent her current helper (her sister-in-law Betsy Barton) to nurse her.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to family workers, Martha utilized the short-term help of neighbors. Between 1785 and 1800, thirty-nine young women lived and worked for some period in the Ballard house; almost all were the daughters of local men in the middle range of the town's tax lists. In contrast to other parts of America, there were no slaves in Hallowell in the late eighteenth century, and few indentured servants.<sup>16</sup> The vast majority of household helpers in Hallowell were single "girls" between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, young women who fully expected to become mistresses of their own houses. Two of Martha's helpers, Polly Savage and Sarah Neal, had babies born out of wedlock, and two, Betsy Barton and Jane Welch, were widows, but these were the exceptions. The only married woman employed in Martha's house was Beulah Prince, a free black. The vast majority of Hallowell helpers were single women who alternated work at home with work "abroad," spending a week or two spinning at a neighbor's house, going home to help with the harvest, moving on to a sister's house where there was illness, going back to the first house or to another to spin or wash.

Such a shuffling and reshuffling of workers was part of the larger system of neighborly exchange that sustained male as well as female economies in this period. Cyrus went "to Gardner's mill" to work on September 11, 1788, because the family mills were still silent; when the mills were restored he would work once more at home. But though the fire had temporarily disrupted the male side of the family economy, it had not disturbed the women's work. Understanding that helps to explain an event that would otherwise be puzzling: in the months following the burning of the sawmill, the Ballards remodeled and improved their house. Certainly Ephraim had a significant income as a surveyor and Martha's midwifery practice was grow-

ing, yet it seems incomprehensible that the Ballards would make capital improvements in the house at the very time they faced the task of rebuilding the mills. Incomprehensible, unless we realize that the house was every bit as much a workplace as the sawmill, and that plastering and closing in the upstairs chambers would provide more room for weaving. In earlier years the girls had moved their beds into the unfinished upstairs chambers in the spring, bringing them back down into the lower rooms in autumn. Now they would have bedrooms year round, and additional space to work.<sup>17</sup>

Theophilus Hamlin "Laid a floor" in the west chamber in October and in the east chamber in November. He also made improvements to the two lower rooms, finishing his carpentry work on December 22, when he "maid a Book Case & put it up in the East room." Hamlin's work probably settled an unpaid debt for board. Three years before he had arrived at the Ballard house from Oxford, bringing letters from the Moore relatives and news of old acquaintances. He had spent at least a month there, helping Cyrus run the mill on one April night and on another getting out of bed with the other men to secure drifting logs. He was not an employee of the mills, however, but an independent tradesman eager to establish a place in the town. Boarding with the Ballards was a preliminary step to establishing his own household, which he did on July 16, 1788, when he brought his bride, Hannah Rockwood, from Oxford to set up housekeeping in the neighborhood near the meeting house.<sup>18</sup>

On September 9, 1788, the day of the town meeting, while Martha and Mrs. Savage were settling accounts, Dolly Ballard and her cousin Parthenia "went to see Mrs Hamlin." The girls had first gone calling on July 27. Their September visit may also have been a social call, though Hannah Hamlin, like her husband, was soon participating in the neighborhood economy. "Mrs. Hamlin wound and warpt a piece here," Martha wrote on November 4, and again on December 8 and December 15. The precise nature of these exchanges is not clear. Hannah may have been setting up the loom for the Ballard girls, or she may have been borrowing the Ballards' equipment to do her own work.

Perhaps both factors were involved. As a young housewife, she had neither space nor resources to fully employ a loom; warping one web for the Ballards allowed her to warp another for herself.

Medicine and textiles are but two strands of a broad and largely invisible local economy managed by women. Housewives traded goods and labor, employed their own and their neighbors' daughters, and reckoned accounts independently of their husbands. Although men owned houses ("I went to *Mr* Densmores to have a gown tried on"), women collected their own rewards ("I gave *Mrs* Densmore 1/6 for doing my gown").<sup>19</sup> Once in a while an entry documents the integration of male and female accounts, as when Martha went to the Hussey house on September 30, 1789, and "had 6 lb of sheeps wool of the old Lady which is to go towards what they owe *Mr* Ballard."<sup>20</sup> Such entries are rare, however. Most of the time, Martha's and Ephraim's accounts were harmoniously separate, he trading lumber with landowners and merchants, she bartering cabbages and textiles with their wives or settling store or midwifery accounts with the men themselves. On November 10, 1789, she wrote: "Borrowed 6 lb & 13 oz of muttun of *Mr* Andrews & receivd Candles I Lent him; I have since paid for the muttun in Baking." And on January 16, 1787: "*Mrs* Weston & I settled all Between Shee & I, viz for 3 quarts of Brandy I had the 9th instant, for ginger spice pepper & Butter on her part, 2 Days work of Dolly 2/, & 2 pr Due to me before & 12 Cabbage heads @ 4/ which shee had 9th inst." (Nathaniel Weston was a local merchant who ran a sloop in the coastal trade. Since he was frequently away, his wife probably kept store as well as household accounts.)

Brandy, ginger, spice, and pepper were of course part of the mercantile trade, but the cabbages Martha gave *Mrs*. Weston and the candles she "lent" *Mr*. Andrews were also a part of the Kennebec economy. Female trade was interwoven with the mercantile economy and with the "family economies" of particular households, but it was not subsumed by either. The two and a half pumpkins *Mrs*. Woodward brought to Martha's house on

September 24, 1789, represented economic interdependence as well as friendship. A month later, *Mrs*. Woodward would comb seven pounds of wool for Martha, wool Martha had gotten from *Mrs*. Cummings in August or from Old Lady Hussey in September or from Cyrus, who had bought 14 1/2 pounds of wool "on Board Danes vesel" on September 29.<sup>21</sup> In a young and growing town, there were few resources that couldn't be turned to advantage, Martha's oven, for example. The house the Ballards rented from John Jones may have been cramped and unfinished, but it did have a bake oven, something many chimneys in the neighborhood lacked. *Mrs*. Forbes, *Mrs*. Savage, *Mrs*. Williams, and *Mrs*. Vose all baked in it from time to time.

Female exchanges weave in and out of the diary almost imperceptibly:

"A piece of Check for an apron" from *Mrs*. Fletcher; "3 lb of flax" to *Mrs*. Densmore.

"5 lb of Poark" from *Mrs*. Pollard; "1 1/2 bushel ashes" to *Mrs*. Brown.

The spinning of "16 skein of Linnen yarn" from *Mrs*. Savage; a "back plaster" to *Mrs*. Weston.

"7 lb of Butter" from *Mrs*. Cummings; "1 lb of hoggs lard" to *Mrs*. Bolton.

"1/2 peck potatoes to plant" from *Mrs*. Woodward; "soap pills" to *Mrs*. Hamlin.

Yarn "coloured Blue" from *Mrs*. Porter; "1 ounce salve" to *Mrs*. Edson.

"400 plants" from *Mrs*. Bolton; "2 lb Tow" to *Mrs*. Welch.<sup>22</sup>

Such entries represent a minimal record of Martha's economic exchanges with her neighbors. Most transactions never made it into the diary. On June 21, 1787, for example, she reported that Merriam Pollard had "sent home 5 lb of poark which shee Borrowed 12 of April 1786," but the entry for April 12 says simply, "I went to *Mr* Williams. *Mrs* Pollard came home with me." Much of the diary can be reduced to just such a simple grammar of coming and going:

"I went to *Mr* Westons" (or "Pollards" or "Howards" or "Husseys" or "Fosters").

"Mrs Savage [or Densmore or Burton or Hamlin or Woodward] came here."

Such entries are a kind of outline describing *where* and with *whom* but not always *what* Martha Ballard did. In the September 9 reckoning with Mrs. Savage, for example, she listed five different commodities or services that had apparently been exchanged in the past six months, yet only one of those products, some yarn "Brot home" on May 9, appears in any of the diary references to the Savage family during that period. The typical entry reads: "Mrs. Savage here" or "Mr Savage his wife & Polly drank tea." When and how the ashes, the medicine, the diaper, or the linen warp changed hands we do not know. Nor do the five items indicated in this reckoning represent all the transactions with the Savages that summer. Separate entries imply additional exchanges of products or services.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the missing transactions may have been recorded on fugitive scraps of paper or in chalk on a wall. Many were probably never written down at all. At the local level, and particularly among women, New England was still primarily a memory economy. Even among merchants as sophisticated as the Howards, written accounts were sometimes incomplete. Sometime after 1799, for instance, William Howard and his sister-in-law Margaret added a marginal note to a Kennebec deed saying they believed that when Back Lot #1 changed hands in 1779 the purchaser had offered notes of hand payable in corn even though no compensation had been mentioned in writing.<sup>24</sup>

Evidence of female trade seldom appears in official records, and when it does the incongruity between the legal language and the actual events is almost comic. In September of 1781, for example, Ephraim Ballard, who was then serving as a constable, was sent to attach the "goods or person" of Susanna Howard (James and Ibbes's mother) to ensure her appearance at a Lincoln County court. Her neighbor Nathaniel Hersey was suing her, claiming that "on divers days & times" she did "with force & arms milk one Hundred and fifty Quarts of . . . milk (of the value of Forty Shilling) from a certain Cow the Property of the said Nathaniel."<sup>25</sup> From the language of the summons one

might imagine Mistress Howard climbing over the fence at night, armed with a dagger or pistol, to extract the contraband milk. Clearly what was at stake here was an unsettled debt accumulated over a very long period. Mr. (or Mrs.) Hersey had been supplying the milk itself or the use of a cow (a not uncommon arrangement). Apparently the debits had grown too heavy on Mrs. Howard's side of the fence or a squabble of some sort had broken the chain of trust. Such occurrences were rare, however. Most of the time pumpkins, ashes, flax, and quarts of milk changed hands silently. We do not know why Martha Ballard recorded two settlements in one year with Mrs. Savage and none with Mrs. Woodward, whose exchanges seem just as steady and almost as substantial. Perhaps some neighbors had shorter memories—or tempers—than others.

Martha reckoned with her household helpers as well as her neighbors, although only a few detailed accounts survive. One, dated March 31, 1791, appears on a blank page in the middle of January 1790. It begins: "Due to Ephraim Ballard on settlement with Parthena Barton," though it is clearly in Martha's handwriting. Martha also recorded her final accounting with Pamela Barton on July 21, 1787. It opens with the ominous statement, "Shee has lost 1 months time or rather workt for her self since shee came here & had 10 yards Cloth at 2/8 per yard." After subtracting lawn for an apron and leather and the making of a pair of shoes, Pamela was debtor to her aunt for one shilling seven pence.

Pamela probably learned some of her most useful skills in Martha's household. Late in the nineteenth century, her daughter recalled that though her mother "never went to school only six weeks after her father moved from Oxford," she was "very good at figures—could reckon up a web to weave in her head when I should be obliged to take a slate and cipher it."<sup>26</sup> For Pamela, as for most women born in the eighteenth century, spinning, weaving, and trading were the best education available. Martha went further than most in keeping written accounts.

Bound into the diary at the end of 1795 are two slim pieces



of paper giving amounts "paid out" in 1795 and 1796. Whether she kept similar lists in other years we do not know. Yet the 1795-1796 accounts are no more complete than the diary itself. Even when taken together, the two sources leave much unexplained. The account for November 10, 1795, for example, reads: "To Mr Dickman for spirit and sugar, 8 [shillings]." The diary entry for the same day says, "I went to see Mrs Dickman. Find her and infant Cleverly. Receivd 12/." Was the eight shillings debited in the first account part of or in addition to the twelve shillings credited in the diary? And did Martha settle with *Mr.* or *Mrs.* Dickman?

The 1795-1796 lists record some but not all of Martha's purchases at the stores. An account for September 7, 1795, fills in the diary entry for that day ("I went to the stores at the Hook") by recording explicit purchases of ribbon, muslin, pins, lace, tape, and silk from Timothy Page and Moses Sewall. But there is no account for April 22, 1795, when the diary tells us she "calld at the most of the stores" at the Hook and "bot 28 lb rice and an ounce turnip seed of Captain Fillebrown, Cost 8/3."

Scattered entries suggest that the lists were an effort to get some measure of control over cash expenditures. Under June 19, 1795, for example, Martha wrote: "Suky Kenady Cash 2/8." In the diary, she explained, "Suky Keneda brot home 8 skeins Lining yarn for which I paid by 1 peck flax seed 1/6, Cash 2/8." A November 14 account lists a payment of six shillings to another servant, Sarah Neal. Presumably this, too, was in cash. Although the diary entry for the same day makes no mention of Neal, it does suggest where the six shillings may have come from: "Mr Greely here at night with his oxen. He has paid me for him self and oxen Cash 9/ and brot me 1 gallon molasses and 1 lb Coffee." Why Martha recorded one transaction in the diary and the other on a separate sheet, we do not know.

Even for her, it was probably difficult to balance such accounts. Yet she made the effort. Following the 1795-1796 lists is a summary of amounts "received" and "paid" in the years 1794, 1795, 1796, and 1797. These totals, however, don't represent all of her exchanges, but only those reflected in the separate accounts. On the average, she took in twenty pounds annually

and expended eighteen. Her expenses varied more than her receipts, going from a low of just over fourteen pounds in 1795 to over twenty pounds in 1797, the one year in which she did not show a substantial surplus. Her attempt to rationalize accounts for these years may represent a new effort during a time of unusual stress (see Chapter Six) or an ongoing practice for which no other evidence survives.

Martha's record-keeping seems disordered and inconsistent because her economic life encompassed such a wide range of behaviors. She "bought," "borrowed," and "traded" goods; received "gifts," "presents," "rewards," "payments," and "fees"; dealt in flax, bread, and molasses as well as in cash; "reckoned" and "made settlement" with her neighbors and sometimes "forgave" (or forgot) their debts. Within this jacquardian weave, her midwifery accounts stand out for their consistency and completeness. Although it is not always clear *when* and *what* Martha was paid, that she was paid can easily be discovered. This may have been a consequence of the cultural significance of midwifery as well as the importance of such income to her own economy. In 1782, Jacob Bailey, a Tory refugee from the Kennebec, characterized the classical Yankee farmer as a person "able with his own industry to make a comfortable living, besides discharging his tax-bill, paying the midwife, and providing a plentiful and greasy dinner on Thanksgiving sufficient to feast an hundred ploughmen."<sup>27</sup> Midwifery bills were not quite equivalent to tax bills, but Martha's diary suggests there was a code of honor that required full, if not always prompt, payment.

Consider the entry for September 17, 1788, in the diary segment that begins this chapter. On that day, Martha delivered Eliab Shaw's wife of a daughter. "Receivd fee October 22, 1792 by Ephraim," she wrote in the margin. Although the transaction took four years to complete, the account is straightforward, a clear record of duty performed and compensation received. Such clarity is typical of the midwifery entries. Even when she failed to record the form and date of the payment, she noted the settlement of the account with a firm X X. (For more on this process, see Chapter Five.)

In comparison, most other transactions are difficult to un-

ravel. Look again at the entry for September 17. Hidden in the account of Mrs. Shaw's delivery is another economic relationship: "Mr Hains Learned Came here." Learned was Martha's cousin. He had been at the Ballards' for a few days in May en route to Livermore, Maine, where he was about to settle. This time he would stay, on and off, for more than a month. Almost three years later, on July 29, 1791, Martha wrote, "Went to Mr Burtuns. Left four Dollars and an order on Mr Cogsill of Boston for 3,000 of shingles left by Hains Larned in Oct 88, which he is to purchase articles with for me in Boston." That comment leads back to an oblique entry for October 22, 1788: "I went to Mr Westons. His Lady lent me 6/. To Doctor Colmans. Had one thousand of shingles. A number of young Ladys here at Eving. Mr. Learned sleeps here." Although the form of the entry suggests the shingles came from Mrs. Weston or from Dr. Colman, they had obviously come from Learned, who may have been paying Martha for the meals he had eaten on September 17 and on other days, and perhaps for washing, sewing, or provisions. What Martha "had" on October 22 was not the shingles themselves, but a note on Mr. Cogsill of Boston, who had received part of Learned's lumber that year.

With the help of Mr. Weston—and Dolly Ballard and Lydia Densmore—Learned's shingles became a new dress. As we have seen, Martha left Learned's order with Weston on July 29, 1791. On September 14, "Dolly wrode to Mr Burtuns. Brot home 8 yards Chintz, which Mr Burtun Bot for me at Boston. It Cost 3/10 pr yard." On September 16, Lydia Densmore and three of her children came to Martha's house. "Shee cutt out my gown," Martha wrote. Six days later, Martha balanced accounts with the dressmaker by attending her in childbirth.

Lumber went down the Kennebec, English chintz came up, but the exchange of one for the other often involved an astonishing number of transactions—men with men, women with men, and women with women.

Trade entries, like work entries, are among the random notations in Martha's diary. In fact, there are only three items in her

daily entries that appear to be totally systematic: births, the weather, and her own whereabouts. If there is a fourth consistent category, it is names of visitors or of persons visited. Those "trivial" entries that so annoyed earlier readers are often composed of little more than the names of persons leaving or arriving, as on September 3, 1788, "I have been at home. Old Mr Smily here. Mrs Savage warpt a piece here." Or on September 16, 1788: "Am not so well as I could wish. Mrs Savage, Wido Williams & Mrs Harris here at Evin. The girls went to Mr Craggs. Jonathan is returned." Names and locations—social connections—form the fabric of Martha's diary.

Forty-three names crowd the fifteen entries that begin this chapter. Martha mentioned six members of her own household, acknowledged news from four relatives to the westward, reported hearsay information about eleven persons, noted visits by her husband or children to six households, recorded twelve visitors to her own house, documented her own repeated visits to three others, and listed five of the persons she met there. The tumble of names is enough to discourage any casual reader, yet Martha surely left out some. At the Colman funeral on September 6, for example, she must have encountered several neighbors, though she didn't record their names. At the Williamses' house on September 7, she documented her omissions by writing, "Mrs Pollard & others there" (emphasis added).

The September entries also show that Martha considered other people's movements as important as her own. Though she was "at home" on seven of the fifteen days, her diary still recorded connections to the world beyond. There were only two days in the entire passage when she neither visited nor received visitors, and on those days other members of her family left the house. Nineteenth-century writers were puzzled by such running about. One Maine historian, remembering his mother's many journeys on horseback, concluded, "Men and women in the last century were different from the race of the present." The same theme appears in a midnineteenth-century history of Winthrop, Maine, a neighboring town to Hallowell. "The first settlers in a new country cultivate the social affections," the author wrote, telling a story about a woman who, when invited

to visit her neighbor on baking day, carried her dough along with her. "What a spectacle it would now present to see a horse, saddled and pillioned, carrying a gentleman and lady on his back, the gentleman having before him a kneading trough, in which was dough for a batch of bread!" He didn't seem to recognize that necessity as well as "social affections" motivated such behavior, nor did he understand that women and their kneading troughs could get to their neighbors' houses with or without the help of their spouses.<sup>28</sup>

In her novel *Northwood*, Sarah Josepha Hale described the eighteenth-century healer Mrs. Watson as a charitable soul, always ready to nurse the sick or watch with the dying, though she warned that "those women who have neither her sleight to work, nor constitution to endure fatigue, must not imitate the worst part of her example—gadding."<sup>29</sup> Martha Ballard was a "gadder." So were most of her neighbors. In fact, too great a concentration on one's own household was probably somewhat suspect. During the year Henry was in New York, Tabitha Sewall and her baby boarded with cousins. "I have not been out since Christmas," she wrote at the beginning of March, "except a few minutes to Brooksies. I have had a number of invitations to ride in slays, but did not accept; for I cannot carry Abby and I cannot enjoy myself to leave her at home."<sup>30</sup> Tabby's behavior was unusual, even for a young mother. Perhaps her reclusiveness was a foreshadowing of the mental illness she would suffer later in life.

In 1790 Martha recorded 642 encounters, at home or abroad, with 299 persons outside her family. Interestingly, the ratio of males to females on this list (157 males, 142 females) is exactly the same as in the Federal Census for that year, which counted 622 white males in Hallowell and 565 white females (the 12 free blacks were not differentiated by sex).<sup>31</sup> Martha's web included both kinds of thread, indigo and white. In contrast, Henry Sewall reported 184 encounters with 115 persons, only thirteen of whom were women. All the 1790 accounts in William Howard's book are under male names.<sup>32</sup> Surprisingly, even when households rather than individuals are the measure, Martha's diary is

more comprehensive than the men's. According to the census, Hallowell had 184 households in 1790. Martha recorded some sort of contact with 89, the Howards 59, Sewall's diary 35.

We are not talking here about intense and sentimental relations with a few persons, but about intermittent and seemingly casual encounters with many. Of the five names most frequently mentioned in the 1790 entries, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Woodward, Mrs. Hamlin, Mrs. Pollard, and Mrs. Burton, none appeared more than a dozen times. Of course, quick visits by near neighbors may not have reached the diary. Still, the steadiness of the listing suggests that Martha did keep a rather thorough record of visits and that extensive rather than intensive relations were the norm.

William and Samuel Howard's account book, though kept for a very different purpose, confirms this pattern. Among his Hallowell accounts for 1790, few debits amount to more than one or two pounds. The exceptions are intriguing—Dr. Colman (who once lived at the Fort), Nathaniel Hersey (the man who sued William's young stepmother, Susanna Howard), and Peter Parker, a blacksmith closely associated with the Howards in another lawsuit. That is, despite the eminence of the Howards, few Hallowell families were willing to become totally dependent on them. Like Martha, most people spread their debt among the dozen or so traders in the town, going to the Fort settlement on one excursion, to the Hook on another, trading with neighbors in between. Martha's diary suggests that this was not just an economic strategy but a deeply ingrained social habit.

The diary also shows that patterns of visiting were as gender-linked as work. Husbands and wives seldom went calling together. Martha recorded thirteen visits by couples in 1790, as on September 5, when "Mr Hamlin and Burtun and their wives here," but hundreds of occasions when women came alone or in company with other women or girls. The entry for September 16, 1788, "Mrs Savage, Wido Williams & Mrs Harris here at Evin," is typical of the 1790 entries as well. In the same way, men usually traveled with men, even for pleasure, as Jonathan Ballard did on September 4, 1788, when he and the hired hand,

Taylor, went downriver to Pownalboro to see the execution. Much of the visiting in Hallowell, like trade, fell into unmixed squares.

Women occasionally left town, as Hannah Ballard did on September 7, 1788, when she went with Sherebiah Towne to see her sister Lucy in Winslow. But it was more common for men than women to travel long distances. The Howard account book is in fact a regional rather than a purely local document, reflecting the reach of the family's trade into upriver towns like Vassalboro or Winslow. Sewall's diary records journeys in the opposite direction as he attended federal district court in Wiscasset and Portland. Vertical connections were also important for small operators like Ephraim Ballard. The sawmill in part accounts for the fact that in 1790 Martha provided sixty-eight overnight accommodations and ninety-five meals to persons outside her family; only six of the overnight guests and twenty-nine of the mealtime visitors were women. Tabitha Sewall must have had similar opportunities. "Took in our housefull of Boarders; & among the rest, a Mr Wight from Medfield, a young ministerial candidate," Henry wrote during the annual court week at Hallowell in January 1790.

Women did, of course, stay away from their homes overnight, in their own neighborhoods, when a delivery or serious illness demanded their services. In her accounts of births and watchings for 1790, Martha mentioned by name 17 percent of the adult women of the town, a remarkable figure given the fact that she often just wrote "calld the women" or "the neighbors came" in describing such events. One of the deliveries Martha performed in 1790 was at Henry Sewall's house. As Henry described it, "Mrs Sewall sent out early in the morning for Mrs Ballard and about 3 o clock in the morning for her women—and was delivered of a son about 3 in the afternoon. Very pleasant. Killed a Cow."<sup>33</sup> Martha's account includes a list of the helpers. It also shows how a meeting at a delivery helped to activate the town's female medical—and charitable—network:

Mrs Sewall was ill till 3 hour pm when shee was through divine asistance made the Living Mother of a Living Son,

her 3d Child. Mrs Brooks, Belcher, Colman, Pollard & Voce assisted us. I went to Colonel Howard at Evening to ask assistance for Polly Taylor. Colonel Sewall gave me 6/8 as a reward. Conducted me over the river. I Calld at Mr Craggs. Was informd that Hannah North was thot to be Expiring this morn, but is revived. Mrs Colman informed me that the Doctor her Husband, gave Hannah a dose of Calomel for worms which gave relief. She went next day to see Mrs Goodin and took Cold which has brot her into the sittuation shee now is . . .<sup>34</sup>

Attending the delivery of one woman, Martha watched over the welfare of two others. Polly Taylor was very much on her mind when she arrived at the delivery. The day before she had borrowed a neighbor's horse to go and see her, finding her "very low." Obviously she talked about Polly's condition with the other women at the delivery. On the way home, she "went to Colonel Howard" to ask for help. It was not the Colonel, however, but "Mrs Betsy Howard & Mrs Colman" who the next day "sent some things here for Polly Taylor, wine, sugar, apples, Bread, and fine linning raggs." Martha was also concerned about Hannah North, having been informed on November 11 that she was "very sick." At the delivery, Dr. Colman's wife filled in some of the details, and on the way home, calling to see Hannah's cousin Mrs. Craig, she learned more.

The references to Polly Taylor are particularly interesting because there are frequent entries in Hallowell's poor relief accounts for the 1790s for payments to "Ebenezer Taylor poor man."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps he was Polly's father. The official records make no mention, however, of the assistance Martha and her neighbors were providing, apparently spontaneously. On November 22, 1790, Martha went to Weston's store. "Bot for Polly Taylor with money which Mr Jackson gave for her 1 lb rasons, 1 quart moloses and 2 S Bisquit."

Martha's entry for November 13 mentions three of the town's four wealthiest families, five of the middle sort, and one of the poorest. According to a tax list for 1790, the four richest men in Hallowell were William Howard, Charles Vaughan, William

Brooks, and Joseph North.<sup>36</sup> Martha called at Howard's house, noted the illness of North's daughter, and acknowledged the presence at the delivery of Susanna Cony Howard Brooks (the "Mrs Howard" of Chapter One). Only the Vaughans are missing from her description. In fact, they seldom appear in the diary. Ephraim Ballard did surveying for "Mr Vahn," but Martha apparently had no contact with the family. She never mentions Dr. Benjamin Vaughan, Charles's brother, or any of the women. She may never have met them. Latecomers to the region, the Vaughans remained somewhat aloof from their Kennebec neighbors, though the doctor, at least (as we shall see in Chapter Seven), fancied himself a benefactor of the town.<sup>37</sup>

Beneath the eminence of the Howards, Brookses, Norths, and Vaughans, Hallowell's wealth distribution was remarkably even. As in many New England towns, wealth was a matter of age more than of class. Sixty-five percent of the men on the list, many of them very young, paid less than three shillings tax. Supply Belcher and Jesse Vose, the husbands of two of the other attendants at the birth, were in that group, as was Henry Sewall, the father. Ephraim Ballard, assessed at four shillings two pence, was among the top 20 percent of the town's taxpayers, as were Amos Pollard and Samuel Colman, the spouses of Tabitha Sewall's other attendants. The poorest (or youngest) men in the town were assessed only a poll tax. These included Anderson Taylor, probably a relative of Polly.<sup>38</sup> (Anderson may have been the "Taylor" who went with Jonathan Ballard to Pownalboro on September 4, 1788, to see the execution.) Thus, in a single brief entry in the diary, Martha covered the full spectrum of affluence in the town.

Such a description gives deeper meaning to the metaphor of the web. Economic and social differences might divide a community; the unseen acts of women wove it together. From the Book of Proverbs ("She stretcheth out her hand to the poor") to countless sermons in New England churches from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, women were praised for their ability to reach out to others in need, regardless of wealth or social position. Four years after Martha's birth, the

Reverend Mr. Jared Eliot of Killingsworth, Connecticut, eulogized a local midwife in such terms: "Her Ear was open to the Complaints of the Afflicted, and her Hand was open for the Supply of the Needy." She was also above dissension: "If others were so Unhappy as to divide into Parties, and to burn with Contention, yet she remain'd a Common Friend to all."<sup>39</sup>

Martha's diary reflects the same ethic. As a midwife she was bound to serve anyone who needed her, regardless of their social position. She was not a democrat, but she was benevolent. In the same month when "Edmond Fortes of the State of Virginia, a Negro man, with his wife and children," was warned out of the town, she delivered "Black Edmund's" wife, "Lydia," of a son.<sup>40</sup> Her charitableness showed itself not only in physical caring but in a reluctance to pass judgment on her neighbors' behavior. "Mrs McNight sleeps here. Her Husband has-tened her out a Dore as shee says," she wrote on December 14, 1787, offering no additional detail on the family fight. Martha would not turn the woman away, but neither would she record without qualification the story of the abusive husband. She was perhaps restrained by the stereotype of the gossipy midwife as much as by her own deeply held Christian values. There is very little of what might be considered gossip in Martha's diary, though after seeing Calvin Edson lying in the road drunk, she offered a special prayer for his newborn daughter: "May God Almighty bless her and help her to shun her father's wicked example."

While other Hallowell folks were busy suing one another, Martha self-consciously excised contention from her diary. In a rare admission of trouble, she noted, "I went to Mrs Westons afternoon. Mr Brooks there. Shew dislike at my informing Mrs Weston of some affairs which hapned in the school."<sup>41</sup> Yet even here she masked the details of the offense with that vague label "some affairs." She seldom went even that far in mentioning disagreement, or potential disagreements, with neighbors.

The Eliot sermon, like many published in the early eighteenth century, played on the disparity between the value of women's contributions and their seeming invisibility. "To denominate a

person Eminently Useful, it is not necessary that they are Advanced to the highest Dignity, either in Church or State," he wrote. Ten years before, Cotton Mather had elaborated on the same theme, describing the pious women of New England as "the Hidden Ones." In real life, of course, women weren't hidden at all. They fed travelers, bargained with their neighbors, and moved about their towns at will, on horseback, in canoes, or afoot. Yet in one sense they were hidden, even in Martha's diary. Women, to use a Biblical metaphor, performed their works under a bushel; men's candles burned on the hill.

There is a consistent leveling in Martha's references to her female neighbors, a blurring of social rank, that contrasts with her usual manner of describing men. Once in a while she used the term "Lady" or its variant "old Lady" in describing other women, and occasionally she referred to a single woman of rank as "Mistress," preserving the earlier, honorific meaning of the word, but most of the time she referred to single women by their first names, to married women, unless they were black, simply as "Mrs," and to widows as either "Mrs" or "wido." Men, on the other hand, might be addressed as "Mr.," "Doctor," "Captain," "Esquire," "Reverend," "Lieutenant," "Colonel," or "Judge," the most distinguished men in the town usually having more than one title to choose from, "Esquire" as well as "Doctor" Cony, "Judge" as well as "Colonel" North. And of course there were two kinds of "Captain," as in Captain Brown, who called the militia company together, and Captain Howard, who commanded the family sloop.

Titles reflected the hierarchical and formal structure of public affairs. Militia titles were especially important. Whatever else the Revolution had done, it had helped to reinforce that old distinction. Massachusetts legislation published in 1786 arranged the men of each town and county into companies, regiments, brigades, and divisions, each headed by an appropriate set of officers. Captain Brown was required to call his train-band together four days in a year "for the purpose of examining their arms and equipment, and instructing them in military exercises." Colonel North was required to assemble all the train-bands in

his regiment for an annual muster. In time, Hallowell would have a major general in the person of Henry Sewall, who for thirty years commanded the Eighth Division of the Massachusetts Militia, comprising the Maine counties of Lincoln, Kennebec, and Somerset.

On court days, Colonel North became Judge North. The Massachusetts judicial system had three tiers. The lowest courts, responsible for enforcing laws against Sabbath-breaking, profanity, and fornication, and for judging small claims, were conducted by a single justice of the peace. At the next level were the Courts of Common Pleas and General Sessions presided over by all the justices of the peace in a given county. In Lincoln County, after 1786, these courts met twice each year, alternately in Pownalboro and Hallowell. Pownalboro had an impressive courthouse and jail, but until 1790 the Hallowell court met at Pollard's Tavern. Capital trials and appeals from the Pleas and Sessions were heard by the Supreme Judicial Court, presided over by circuit judges who traveled from county to county. To ratify their authority and the dignity of their calling, these men appeared on the bench in robes and wigs, wearing black silk in summer and scarlet in winter. Jonathan Ballard observed one result of this court's labors when he went to Pownalboro on September 4, 1788, to see the execution of an Irishman named John O'Neil for the murder of Michael Cleary of Pemaquid Falls. Like militia musters, courts offered dignity to ordinary men, who served as grand jurors, petit jurors, constables, clerks, and referees, if not as judges. Women participated in court proceedings only as witnesses.

At the local level, the town meeting also offered offices, if not titles, to most men, at least during some period of their lives. Of the twelve adult males mentioned in the diary segment for September 3-17, 1788, seven can be found on the list of town officers for that year. James Page and James Carr, like Ephraim Ballard, were selectmen. Beriah Ingerham (or Ingraham) was on the Committee to Inspect the Fishery; Mr. Palmer (or Parmer) was both a Packer of Fish and a Culler of Hoops & Staves. Colonel North was the town's Sealer of Weights & Measures.

Dr. Colman was a Field Driver, and Elias Craig ("Mr. Cragg") was a Surveyor of Lumber.<sup>46</sup> Town offices reflected the major commercial products of the town, the commodities men shipped down the river into the streams of international trade. They also reflected male ownership of land, buildings, and cattle, some officers being responsible for the maintenance of public buildings and roads, others for surveying the fences that presumably made good neighbors or for managing the capture of stray animals belonging to bad ones.

There were no Committees to Inspect the Kitchens and Gardens of Hallowell, no Packers of Candles or Cullers of Linen Thread, nor was there a Sealer of Reels and Sleighs. Women's invisibility in town records reflected the patriarchal organization of society as well as the perishable and invisible nature of their work. Land endured from generation to generation, its boundaries defined in closely written documents entered into leather-bound volumes by conscientious clerks like Henry Sewall. Butter, ashes, and "fine linning rags" simply disappeared. Consider the differing obligations of Merriam Pollard, who so frequently laid out the dead, and of her husband, Amos, who was town sexton as well as a tavern keeper. A sexton in early New England was not only responsible for tolling the meeting-house bell, something Hallowell did not have in 1788, but for supervising burial, that is for allotting a discrete piece of ground to the dead. In comparison, Merriam Pollard's concern was for the perishable body itself. The clothing as well as the flesh it covered would soon decay; the ceremonial significance of the careful washing and dressing presumably would not. Day by day women negotiated the fragile threads of ordinary need that bound families together.

X If women had a collective consciousness, it was surely developed in such work. There is a telling symmetry in a set of entries for September 20-21, 1789. While "Mrs Cleark, Medcalf, Ney, Hollowell, & Mrs Sewall" watched with Martha Ballard at Mrs. Sherburne's delivery, "Captain Brown called his Company together." A delivery in Hallowell was a kind of muster, and Martha Ballard was both captain and clerk. Yet she had little

patience with the noise and combativeness of male politics. "Mr Ballard Cyrus & Silva at Town meeting," she wrote on one March day. "There was but little done Except contend (a great evil)."<sup>47</sup> She also had reason to question the manly exercises of the militia. During one muster she reported, "the field piece was fird the most of the night which interrupted my patient much." The next day after the birth of a "fine son," when "Every Circumstance seemd agreeable," she was hastened from the house to treat three of the young troopers. "Alas what Changing seins take place," she wrote, "at 8 in the Eving as a number were Collected & *diverting themselves*, if I may use the Expression, by firing the field pieces, three men . . . were wounded by an unexpected discharg by reason of its not being properly swabed. The two were thought to be mortally wounded . . . I went & Bathed their wounds."<sup>48</sup> At such times a woman might well question the wisdom of her town's rulers and protectors.